

SPECIAL
JANUARY
2017

PRICE:
FREE

LOADING... SCREECH



Some snappy
catchphrase
goes here.

Honestly, it
does.

Vintage & Modern Tech Blog

Welcome to the first Loading Screech Newsletter. 2016 seems to have been the year of the ZX Spectrum, with two new devices - the Vega+ and the Next being announced, both with shells designed by Rick Dickinson, who designed the original Speccy. One is a fully functional handheld with built-in screen, the other a full sized keyboard offering the complete ZX experience and then some. There have been a couple of misfires too.

'The 64' handheld & full keyboard didn't meet its crowdfunding target & the Coleco Chamelon turned out to be a SNES-in-Jag's clothing. Admist all this confusion and controversy, surely a few people are thinking - why don't they just update the emulators? *That's what people were already using.* Some people own Vegas, & they want to play text adventures with no keyboard - I've been tackling this issue myself with a program I'm making called Vegadvent - more on that on page 2.

Stephen



Worth A Try - Repton Mobile

If there's a recurring theme among people describing Google Play, (previously known as Android Market), it's that the quality of the apps is varied, with some being as polished as a finest platinum, and others being as polished as a severely neglected pub toilet at 4am on the morning after half-price baked beans special night.

At the same time, when it comes to describing the early days of home computer games, it is often mentioned that the quality of clones of popular arcade games was as predictable as the traction of a

of a heavily tranquilised, cross-eyed dairy cow travelling down a sharp incline following an industrial scale butter spillage.

So, what happens when you cross Google Play with a fairly obvious 8-bit clone of the arcade game Boulderdash? It turns out, actually - a real jewel of a smartphone game.

That game is called Repton 1, and it's a remake of the old Superior Software title by Tim Tyler, which was available on the BBC Micro, Acorn Electron, C64, and ZX Spectrum back-in-the-day. You play Repton, and have to collect a number of diamonds from underground caves, avoiding rocks, eggs, and the monsters that hatch from them. There are also safes to bypass, for which keys need to be collected.

Where some games can be fiddly to control on Android devices, often suggesting an add-on controller is desperately needed, Repton 1 has really nice gesture control. Simply touching a little further along from Repton, will lead to him walking in that direction. There's no need for an on-screen joystick or keyboard, in part because the game only really needed four keys in the days when it was played on computers with a keyboard.

It's well worth downloading the free version - which some discerning players may like to note appears to include no adverts - for the first few levels and, if you're good enough to progress there are in-game purchases for varying skill levels (prices correct on 3rd Nov 2016) ranging from £0.79 GBP for the Young Repton levels to £2.29 GBP for the harder Tricky and Challenge level packs. A discount Mega Bundle, containing all the levels costs £8.95 GBP.

Repton 1 is available on Google Play from Superior Interactive, and is also available for Apple devices including the iPhone and iPad as well as PCs.

The Commodore brand is currently owned by Cloanto, who offer easy-to-use emulators known as C64 & Amiga Forever. Playing the bundled games is made simple by the media player style system - press play and your game or scene demo runs. More info at www.amigaforever.com.

Having announced the Vega + handheld console would be ready by October 2016, Retro Computers Ltd have now pushed the date back, blaming the discovery of an area requiring improvement during playtesting.

They are stating that Vega + systems will now be fitted with an improved button, which will also affect models from their first production run, which will be retroactively fitted with the improved component. With Christmas 2016 looming, there are no guarantees of the devices being available in stores by the 25th December.

VEGADVENT

```
v0.4.3b @2015 Ste Nichol
VERY GLITCHY PREVIEW DEMO
+Room descriptions.
+Puzzle Logic.
+Items & Containers.
+LDS Editor.
+Options.
+Decorative Border.
+TEST Game.
+Add Password.
+SAVE GAME.
+LOAD Game.
```

FREE RAM: 14672 Bytes

VEGA ADVENTURE MAKER

The ZX Spectrum Vega has no keyboard. ZX Spectrum enthusiasts bought a Vega. The enthusiasts want to play text adventures, popular on the Speccy back in the 1980s, but lo' and behold - we're back to the issue of having no keyboard.

Enter Vegadvent - a handy system not dis-similar to text adventure software available in the past but, it needs no keyboard.

The core principal is that the engine - called Vegadvent - allows directional control through the D-Pad, and makes use of the other buttons for essential tasks like picking up objects and using them. Objects and textual descriptions can be input through the keyboard on a 20th century ZX Spectrum or emulator, and the data saved to be used on the Vega via the addition of a standard Vega keymap.

Although not allowing existing text adventures to be directly played on a 2015 model Vega, I am hoping this will be a useful program. More on the project when it nears a usable state.

WHEN ALEX DIDN'T DO IT - COMPLETE SOLUTION

PART ONE

The aim of this part is to obtain some change, in order to catch the cable car (tram in versions before v1.4) and thus receive the password for Part Two. First you must escape your own house, which you've managed to lose the keys for after an office party.

EXAM WARDROBE, GET SUIT, SOUTH, GET SLIPPERS, EXAM PHONE, SOUTH, GET AIRHORN, WEST, GET AFTERSHAVE, EAST, SOUTH, GET BOLTCUTTERS, GET UNDERPANTS, EXAM DOG, USE AFTERSHAVE (You must have the slippers in your inventory also), USE SLIPPERS(SMELLY), GET KEY, WEST, NORTH, NORTH, NORTH, USE KEY, WEST, NORTH, USE BOLTCUTTERS, GET BIKE(UNLOCKED), SOUTH, EAST, EAST, EAST, SOUTH, SOUTH, USE AIRHORN, **NPC DROPS MOBILE**, GET MOBILE, SOUTH, EAST, EXAM BRIAN, WEST, GET TROUSERS(GREY), EAST, NORTH, EAST, EAST, NORTH, EAST (into shop), EXAM SHOPKEEPER, GIVE SHOPKEEPER AFTERSHAVE, SHOPKEEPER GIVES YOU MONEY1, you can immediately GIVE SHOPKEEPER MONEY1, SHOPKEEPER GIVES YOU black DYE, WEST (out of shop), NORTH, WEST, GET SHIRT(WHITE), WEST, WEST, WEST, WEST, SOUTH, EXAM SOPHIE, WEST, SOUTH, EXAM PAYPHONE, Message: "It's one of those... 0449200870", SOUTH, EXAM DETECTIVE, WEST, "The detective isn't going to let you in there.", USE MOBILE, 2, The DETECTIVE walks over to the payphone, WEST, SOUTH, GET EREADER, NORTH, WEST, GET SHOES(BLACK), GET BUCKET(EMPTY), EAST, EAST, NORTH, NORTH, EAST, NORTH, EAST, EAST, EAST, EAST, Crossroads, SOUTH, SOUTH, SOUTH, Seafront Road, EAST, EAST, EAST, NORTH, EAST (into shop), GIVE SHOPKEEPER SHIRT(WHITE), She gives you the BIKINI, WEST, NORTH, WEST, WEST, WEST, WEST, WEST, SOUTH, GIVE SOPHIE BIKINI, New item(s) in inventory, NORTH, EAST, EAST, EAST, Crossroads, SOUTH, SOUTH, SOUTH, Seafront Road, EAST, EAST, EAST, NORTH, NORTH, WEST, Boating Lake, EXAM DYE, USE BUCKET (EMPTY), USE DYE, USE TROUSERS(GREY), Message: "You made black, WET TROUSERS", EAST, NORTH, WEST, USE DRYER, Park keeper chases you, EAST, SOUTH, SOUTH, WEST, WEST, SOUTH, INVENTORY, GIVE BRIAN UNDERPANTS, GIVE BRIAN TROUSERS(BLACK), GIVE BRIAN SHOES(BLACK), GIVE BRIAN SHIRT(RED), message BRIAN: "Thanks, mate", you now have MONEY20 in your inventory, NORTH, WEST, NORTH, WEST, Arcade Entrance, WEST, USE MONEY20, GET CHANGE, EAST, EAST, SOUTH, EAST, EAST, EAST, NORTH, NORTH, WEST, WEST, NORTH, USE CHANGE, Here you can see: TICKET. Part One is now complete and you have 218 points. Don't forget to write down the password for Part Two (if you won't remember it.)

WHEN ALEX DIDN'T DO IT - COMPLETE SOLUTION(continued...)

PART TWO

Onboard the cable car. EXAMINE LUGGAGE, EAST, DOWN, GET SHOVEL, NORTH, Message "Your Way is blocked...", USE SHOVEL, NORTH, GET ROPE, SOUTH, DOWN, USE ROPE, EXAMINE SUITCASE, GET BINOCULARS, GET KEY, USE ROPE, UP, NORTH, USE KEY, Cable Car, USE ROPE, EXAM PROMOBOT, GET GIFTCARD, EAST, SOUTH, EXAM TRADER, GET MEDICINE, USE MEDICINE, Message: "Healed. You will live to fight another day.", GET TOGA, EAST, SOUTH, EXAM CHEF, GET PASTA, NORTH, WEST, NORTH, EAST, EXAM HEADSTONE, NORTH, EXAM BELL, USE PASTA, EXAM BIBLE, GET LOCKPICK, SOUTH, WEST, SOUTH, SOUTH, EXAM SIGN, USE LOCKPICK, EXAM FOREMAN, GET BILLBOARD, GET PAN, GET BROKEN_ROBOT, NORTH, NORTH, WEST, Path to City, USE PAN, Message: "You made money! £45.", EAST, EXAM GOODE, GIVE GOODE BINOCULARS, GET FRAGMENT, EXAM FRAGMENT, SOUTH, EXAM TRADER, GET MULTITOOL, GET SOLARGUN, EAST, SOUTH, SOUTH, EXAM HOODED_MAN, GET EARPIECE, USE MULTITOOL, GET BATTERY, NORTH, NORTH, WEST, NORTH, Graveyard, SOUTH, Workshop, USE BATTERY, Message: "Here you can see: WORKING_ROBOT", USE SOLARGUN, Message: "Here you can see: ARMED_ROBOT", GET ARMED_ROBOT, NORTH, WEST, EXAM BEGGAR, SOUTH, SOUTH, USE BILLBOARD (to bridge ditch), WEST, EXAM HATCH, EXAM CYBORG, "Will you escape to the EAST or FIGHT?" choose: FIGHT, GET LASER, USE LASER, DOWN, EXAM KEYPAD, Password is 4444YS73, UP, WEST, End of Part Two, the password for part three is displayed.

PART THREE

GET FORK, USE FORK, EXAM SAILOR, WEST, LOOK, GET PLATE, EXAM PLATE, GET FOIL, EXAM FOIL, GET BONE, EAST, EXAM GUARD, Sailor gives you something, INVENTORY, USE WHISTLE, Message: "A dog appears...", USE BONE, GET KEY, USE KEY, Whatever you do the game now enters into a fight sequence, For this fight only, use any combination of moves except DODGE, GET UNLIT TORCH, GET SIGNAL_GUN, SOUTH, EXAM PERFECT LOCKER, GET PASSCARD, USE PASSCARD, GET FRAGMENT, GET TOAD, EXAM PLAQUE, A clue is displayed, the answer is tunnel, EXAM RED CONSOLE, At the prompt type TUNNEL, Message: "You hear water draining...", NORTH, WEST, UP, EAST, SOUTH, SOUTH, GET REPELLENT, GET MEDICINE, GET ROPE, NORTH, NORTH, INV, EXAM UNLIT TORCH, LIGHT UNLIT TORCH, UP, USE FOIL, USE BLUE SWITCH, WEST, WEST, You see a frogman, USE TOAD, GET DIVING_GEAR, WEST, EXAM CLOSED HATCH, Remember Red x5, EAST, EAST, EAST, USE RED SWITCH five times, Message: *CLUNK*, WEST, WEST, WEST, EXAM CLOSED HATCH, USE OPEN HATCH, GET EARPIECE, EXAM FRAGMENT, it's a cipher, USE BLUE CONSOLE, STAGE ONE PASSWORD IS QUANTUM, STAGE TWO PASSWORD is EIGHT, EAST, EAST, Water Chamber 2 (if you don't have the diving gear, you'll have to get it after narrowly escaping your doom in Chamber 2), EXAM LETTERING, The lettering says "Alex's Spot", DOWN, GET everything in the room, UP, WEST, WEST, USE GRAPPLE HOOK, New Item(S) in inventory, INV, USE GRAPPLE ROPE, EAST, EAST, EAST, DOWN, WEST, DOWN, EAST, SOUTH, WEST, USE SIGNAL_GUN (You must be carrying the flare, the GIANT SPIDER scurries away), WEST, EXAM EARPIECE, EXAM YELLOW CONSOLE, Enter 1248DHP, Whatever you do next, MORTYNA starts talking, after the conversation you receive a message on your earpiece, telling you to type 1982 on the keypad, LOOK, EXAM KEYPAD, USE KEYPAD, Type 1982, Message: "Transmitting co-ordinates.", Regardless of your next action, BRIAN blocks your path, USE TASER to defeat BRIAN, MORTYNA leaves the room, now USE BLACK CONSOLE, Remembering Capt. Goode's words in Part Two, answer the clue with POOP, A message is displayed and you find yourself back in your living room from Part One, EXAM TV, EXAM Z80A, A message appears telling you the game is now complete and your score is 255.

HINTS & TIPS

1. Recover from a SEUD crash - type RANDOMIZE USR 47500 as a command with no line number (Don't NEW and don't use the loader program or it will try to reload SEUD). Then press RETURN.
2. Most compatible Amiga to emulate - A500 Plus or A1200.
3. Air Apparent Infy Helis - POKE 48523,182
4. Override PS2 Slim Parental Controls - Press [Select] 7444, then set up new password (Disclaimer - this info is intended to assist adults - not kids - locked out of a used PS2).



The 'other' Retro Handhelds: Arcade Gamer Portable

The ZX Spectrum Vega+ and The 64 certainly attracted interest this year (the latter not enough to meet the crowdfunding target) but, the concept of a handheld retro system is nothing new and there are already a number of them around. One such device is the Arcade Gamer Portable handheld by AtGames.

The handheld comes with a selection of 30 SEGA Master System and Game Gear games built-in, including well-known titles such as Alex Kidd in Miracle World, Golden Axe, and Sonic Spinball. There is no SD-slot or other alternative, meaning no extra games can be easily added.

Video is provided by the integrated 2.4" TFT screen, with the option of outputting a signal to a television through a composite A/V cable. The cable needs a jack-type connector on the handheld end. Although not popular now as they used to be, searching for a camcorder cable tends to bring up results on shopping websites.

Another jack-type connector, on the underside of the device provides the means to use headphones for private gaming, and the Arcade Gamer Portable has a built-in volume control.

The D-Pad and two action buttons are reasonably sturdy, suggesting that they would stand up well to many intense gaming sessions. The D-Pad also has a nice moulded shape, allowing you to slide your thumb around without having

to take it off one button and then plonk it down on the other. It's nice not to have plastic corners digging into your flesh as you play.

I have played on my Arcade Gamer Portable many times over the past few years, and never had any cause of complaint. The only damage was caused when I decided to open it up out of curiosity and have a look inside - always something only a professional should do, and preferably after any warranties have expired.

With fairly sturdy construction and a built-in library of previously expensive cartridge titles built-in and ready to go, this handheld provides convenience and lots of fun for the relatively low cost of £25 to £40 that you will normally pay.

AtGames also produce a handheld version of the SEGA Megadrive(Genesis) which comes with a built-in SD card slot for adding new games from their website, which I shall not write about here but, that also is a good - but, more expensive - device.

AtGames Arcade Gamer Portable - Built-In Games

- 01.Alex Kidd In High Tech World
- 02.Alex Kidd In Miracle World
- 03.Alex Kidd: The Lost Stars
- 04.Assault City
- 05.Astro Warrior
- 06.Aztec Adventure
- 07.Baku Baku Animal
- 08.Bomber Raid
- 09.Columns
- 10.Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine
- 11.Dragon Crystal
- 12.Ecco: The Tides of Time
- 13.Fantasy Zone
- 14.Fantasy Zone II(Opa Opa)
- 15.Gain Ground
- 16.Global Defense
- 17.Golden Axe
- 18.Kung Fu Kid
- 19.Penguin Land
- 20.Putt and Putter
- 21.Quartet
- 22.Ristar the Shooting Star
- 23.Snail Maze
- 24.Sonic Drift 2
- 25.Sonic Chase
- 26.Sonic Spinball
- 27.Sonic Triple Trouble
- 28.Super Columns
- 29.Tails Adventure
- 30.The Ninja

Three Z80 Computer Kits You Can Build Today

Made by a breakaway group from Intel, the Z80 processor was an enhancement of Intel's own 8080, using different names for its instruction set to cover Zilog's posterior legally. Features such as built in Dynamic-RAM refresh (DRAM was significantly cheaper than SRAM in the late 1970's and early 80's) helped the chip find its way into many 8-bit devices of the time, such as the Sinclair ZX80, ZX81, and ZX Spectrum, the Amstrad CPC464, MSX and - near the end of the 1980's - the Nintendo Gameboy (in a custom form).

Its use continued into the 1990's, with the Z80 repurposed as a Graphics Processor Unit in the SEGA Megadrive, and the Z80 went all the way up to 24-bit in later incarnations created and sold by Zilog into the mid to late 2000's.

Building a homebrew computer is a fairly popular hobby among the retro community, and why not? What railway enthusiast would pass up the chance to build a full-size replica steam engine, or car collector the opportunity of building a kit of a Model T-Ford or aircraft-without-wings sports car?

The Z80 is a popular choice today well documented - with a plethora of books, datasheets, websites, and videos to study - fairly simple to understand (The Amiga and ST's Motorola 68000 is called a CISC chip for a reason - it stands for Complex Instruction Set Computer), and with parts manufactured in the 1990's and 2000's still available to buy new today -and if not, you could always raid the used parts bin, in fact some people do - and make a competition out of it.

(Notice - details are correct at the time of publication)

There are three kits in particular that have interested me in recent times, these are:

1. The RC2014

Winner of the Retro Challenge 2014, this kit is built around a backplane, with small module boards for the CPU, ROM, RAM, and Serial communications. The advantage is, that you can build it up piece by piece, and so are not confronted by a daunting number of connections on an expensive board, that might be wrecked by a couple of mistakes. The modules are available to buy separately either as bare PCB's or kits of parts, and the creator of the RC2014 is continuing to add new modules, as could the owner in the spirit of the creativity of the early microcomputer scene. I've been trying to build one slowly myself. The only negative comment I will make is that Tindie, the shopping service on which the RC2014 is sold - throws up some warnings from security software, and some may find that disconcerting. The seller does often pop up on eBay.co.uk as well, selling the same products.

The RC2014 is available on Tindie from Semachthemonkey (no relation to Cap'n Goode), with prices starting from £16.11GBP at www.tindie.com/products/Semachthemonkey/rc2014-homebrew-z80-computer-kit/

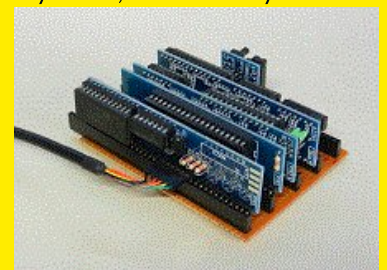
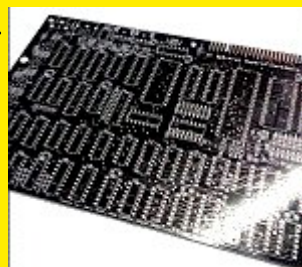
2.The Harlequin

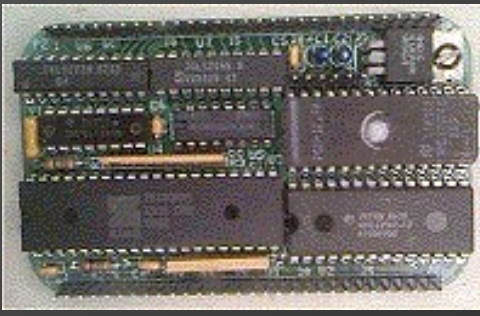
Before appearing, and then disappearing, as part of the original ZX Spectrum Vega team, Chris Smith was well known for having reversed engineered the ULA (Uncommitted Logic Array) in the ZX Spectrum, the one custom chip - similar to a CPLD - that assisted the Z80A inside Sinclair Research's microcomputer in displaying video, loading and saving, and other tasks. The research was published in a book, entitled 'The ZX Spectrum ULA - Designing a Microcomputer'.

From that research, the Harlequin Superfo was born - available as a 48k or 128k model, the board implements the ZX Spectrum ULA as ordinary logic IC's. This is an interesting, if daunting project (with all its parts), in a world where original ZX Spectrums are failing, being cannibalised for parts to fix other Spectrums, being modded, and generally shrinking in number - as the Harlequin fits comfortably inside a ZX Spectrum + casing (the one with the QL-style upgrade keyboard, and is a fully featured clone complete with all aspects and abilities of the original micro.

The Harlequin can be bought as a bare PCB at £24.99, or a kit of parts costing £84.99, and is available in the webshop at www.bytedelight.com

Continued on Page n...





3.The Z80 Membership Card

Available from the US via international postage, the Z80 Membership Card is a pocket sized microcomputer which the creator, Lee A.Hart, describes as being a bit like an Arduino, BASIC Stamp or other such development board.

It is comprised of two fully developed boards, handling central processing operations and serial communication, and an optional third proto-board for adding to the design yourself. There is a built in Hexadecimal keyboard and full QWERTY control through RS232 serial.

There is also a fictional story accompanying the development of the Membership Card, featuring characters with almost familiar names, such as Gil Bates, who has been inspired to design his own computer by the recent arrival of the Altair 8800 on the electronics scene.

The Z80 Membership Card is priced at \$19USD plus \$10 for international shipping, or \$80+\$15 international shipping available from www.sunrise-ev.com/z80.htm

Disclaimer: Please observe that I cannot hold accept any responsibility for any results of you building or trying to make these kits.



Loading Screech Guide -

HOW TO BE A PROGRAMMER

The lovers, the motorbikes, the haemorrhoids - who doesn't want to be a programmer? Find out how with this handy guide.



Things you will need:

#01. Books

You might think the opposite is true and you don't need them but, even if you are fluent in C++ or Python, books make you look more intellectual. Make sure they relate to programming, as a copy of the latest Papier Maiche Man graphic novel just won't do it for you. With a little scissor work, a nice thick book could be hollowed out to hide snacks, or even a small handheld console.

#02. Snacks

Forget about normal office hours, programming is a big commitment, and you won't be making it home in time for tea with that release date for your software fast approaching. Avoid anything like nuts if you are working in the same room as your colleagues. Otherwise, you might want to swing past the local leisure centre and pick up a jumbo bag of nose pegs on the way to work.

#03. Haemorrhoid Cream

Most programming is done sitting down so, after a few months on your posterior you might well start to develop problems in this area of your anatomy. Just remember to apply the cream in private - these days everyone seems to have a camera phone.

#04. Spectacles

These props will help you look the stereotypical part. Also useful for reading the dodgy smallprint on software contracts, and starting camp fires following attacks from extraterrestrials or rampant gamers demanding solutions that consequently leave your offices without power.

#05. Framed Photo

Okay, maybe you're married, maybe you're single - either way, this is your route to all the days you want off. Just make sure you got the frame from a shop your boss doesn't go to, or he'll realise that really is a bunch of supermodels grinning like lunatics in the image (obviously if you got lucky and married a supermodel, this doesn't apply).

#06. Writing Pad

Naturally, this is for sketching sprites, designing levels, doing your maths and all that other intellectual stuff. Also comes in handy for a real-life game of paper-toss.

#07. Pillow

Useful for your head or bum, just don't swap over too soon after the latter is you've just devoured a tub of microwaveable baked beans.

< FIVE MINUTE BASIC #2 - 'My Spectrum is Made by Commodore'

(From Loading Screech Blog July 20, 2014)

Here's a fun little program that makes it look like your Sinclair ZX Spectrum is a Commodore 64. The C64 start screen is easily recreatable with some print commands and changes to the colour of the paper, border, and text:

```
1 REM My Spectrum Is Made by Commodore
2 REM by Stephen Nichol 2014
10 BORDER 1: PAPER 1: INK 5: CLS
20 PRINT BRIGHT 0; INK 5; AT 1,1; "**** COMMODORE 64 BASIC V2 ****"
30 PRINT AT 2,0; " "
40 PRINT AT 3,0; "64K RAM SYSTEM 38911 BASIC BYTES FREE"
50 PRINT AT 4,0; " "
60 PRINT AT 5,0; "READY."
70 PRINT AT 6,0; " "
80 PRINT AT 6,0; " "
90 PRINT FLASH 1; AT 7,1; " "
100 PAUSE 250
110 FOR p=0 TO 6 STEP 1
120 PAPER p: BORDER p+1: CLS
130 BEEP 0.1,RND*12: BEEP 0.2,RND*9
140 NEXT p
150 BORDER 7: PAPER 7: INK 0: CLS
160 print at 21, 0; "Did I fool you?!?"
170 pause 100
180 PRINT AT 21,0; "(c)1982 Sinclair Research Ltd"
```

Explanation/Refresher:

Lines 1 and 2 are REMarks indicating the nature and author of the program. Just about anything can be put in a REM statement and it won't affect the running of the program. There are other uses for these but remarks/comments is definitely the most common usage.

Line 10 sets the border and paper to colour 1 which is dark blue. Ink 5 means cyan ink.

Lines 20 to 90 set out the C64 style text, the AT statements position the screen on the low-res grid which works in a slightly odd way. Unlike the high resolution grid, it uses y,x co-ordinates instead of x,y.

Line 100 pauses for 250 screen refreshes. The PAL screen cycles at 50Hz so 250 divided by 50 is 5 seconds of pausing.

Lines 110 to 140 are a For...Next loop that change the colour of the screen and border in steps of 1. The +1 means that the border is always a different colour to the paper. That is also why the For statement ends at 6, instead of 7 which is the final colour, otherwise our program would stop working.

Line 150 sets the colours of the paper, border, and ink to the black and white attributes used in the Sinclair Research start screen found on all Western European Spectrums earlier than the 128k +2.

Line 160 prints a message asking if anyone was fooled. You could change the colour of this, or make it flash if you wanted to.

Line 170 pauses for 2 seconds (2x50hz = Pause 100)

Finally, line 180, prints the world famous Sinclair Research copyright message (please note - there is an actual copyright symbol on the Spectrum, instead of the brackets and letter c that I have used in this text).

September 1st 2016 - The Gigabyte Trap

At a guess it's been a year and three months since I started making this game - a 20 level platformer called Cap'n Rescue, for Windows 10 PCs. That originally had nothing to rescue in it. Except a Captain. So, I guess that's okay then. Still, I've now added some sailors to rescue as well.

At various times I've thought that I was close to finished and - every time, a new problem crops up. How long does it take one person to make a full sized retro-style game? Turns out the answer is - no matter what tools are used - quite a long time.

Most recently I've been encountering lag in the game from around level 9 onwards. Everything on the screen goes at a snails pace. I try and increase the player speed, no apparent change.

Maybe there's something wrong in the logic? Nope - can't see anything. Even so, I make a few clicks, and try running Level 9 with the logic from Level 1. That will change the background music and a few other things but, might solve some problems.

Nope - still no change. Level 9 runs like a decrepit and elderly snail, travelling through treacle -wearing an elastic band with one end wrapped around it's waist and the other end around a tree trunk, that has forgotten it's supposed to be going in the other direction anyway.

On previous attempts to solve this problem, my thoughts have become tired and I haven't been able to 'see the wood for trees' but, I have a clear mind now and a great idea. I deactivate all of the logic, except for the player controls.

Now, I can't pick anything up. Enemies remain stationary, and cannot be removed. Surprise - the problem isn't in the player controls.

One by one, I reactivate the various blocks of logic. It soon becomes apparent that the problem is with a group of instructions for 'left-right enemies', which is self-explanatory.

I know from the manual of the game engine I am using, that too many objects on screen can slow things down but, I already split this level into two for exactly that reason, and things had seemed okay. But, then - I added those sailors for the player to rescue.

I halve the number of enemies on the level, deleting the rest. My frame rate is back, the game is running smoothly - until I meet the sailors, then we're going through liquid tar again. So, I delete one of the sailors - the game is smooth again.

Problem solved. A further thought is that the High Density (HD) resolution of my pixel graphics means I can have even less objects on screen. As the next thing I want to look at - once all the levels are less bloated - is player speed, this information may become useful again. Cap'n Goode does plod a bit, and I'd like him to be a bit more nippy like certain, possibly famous, 1990s platform game characters from Japan.

Thanks for reading
Stephen

Loading Screech Annual 2017

A free vintage & modern tech themed newsletter

All articles written by Stephen Nichol. Info correct at time published.

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NEW
YEAR!**